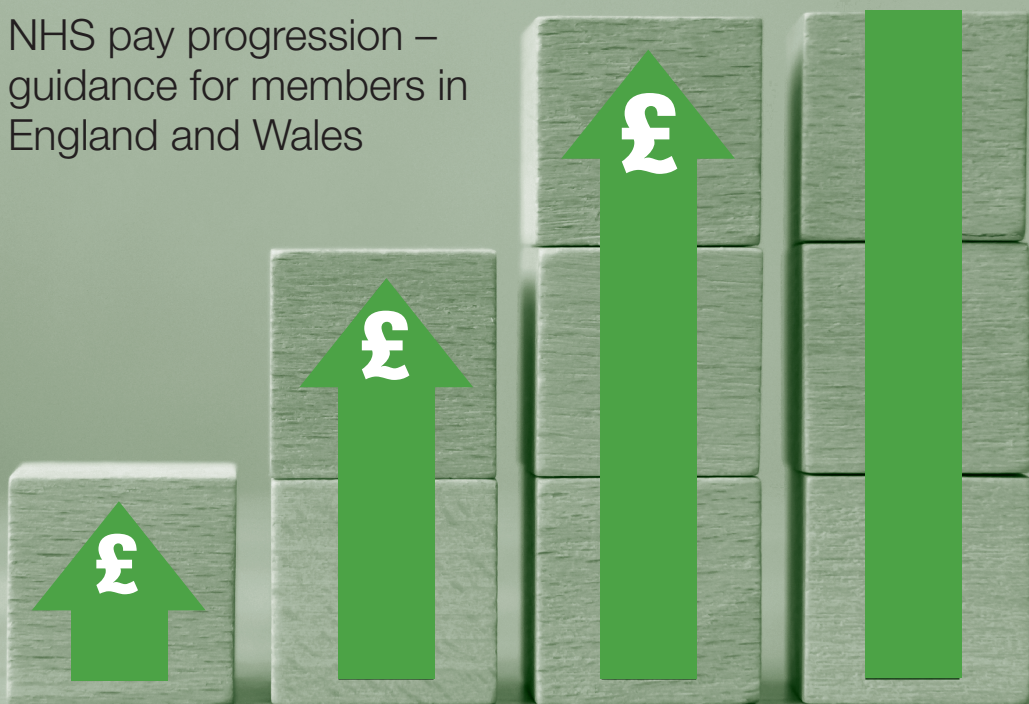


# Step by step

NHS pay progression –  
guidance for members in  
England and Wales



This guide for members in England and Wales explains the NHS pay progression process and how it links to your annual appraisal - including tips on how to get the best out of the process.

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# Pay step progression explained

A new pay progression framework came into effect on 1 April 2019. This guidance will help you understand how the new framework will apply to you and how you can get the best out of the pay progression and appraisal processes.

## What is the pay progression framework?

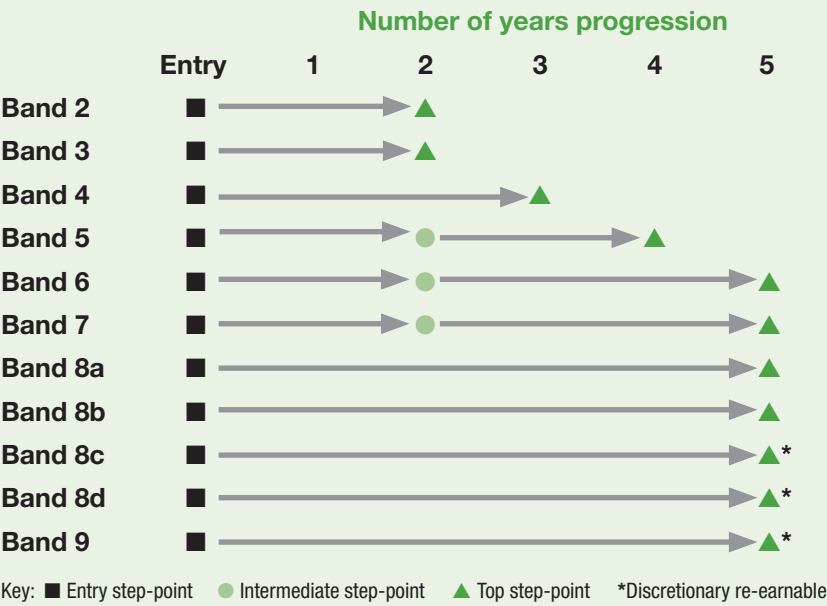
The 2018 NHS pay deal introduced a new pay progression framework. It describes the way in which staff will move from the entry point through to the top of their pay band in pay steps (increments) over time. Progression through your pay band will no longer take place annually. The pay steps will take longer to reach but you will get to the top of your band more quickly than before.

## Does the pay progression framework apply to me?

The framework applies to you if you started working for the NHS on or after 1 April 2019, or for existing staff, if you were promoted on or after 1 April 2019. For all other employees the new pay progression framework applies from 1 April 2021.

## How many pay steps (increments) are there in my pay band?

Staff in bands 2, 3, 4, 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d and 9 will have one pay step date (these bands have an entry point and a top point.) Staff in bands 5, 6 and 7 will have two pay step dates (these bands have an entry point, a middle point and a top point.)



## How do I move up to my next pay step point?

To progress to your next pay step point, you will need to have met the following standards, to show that:

1. You have had an appraisal meeting within the last 12 months and the outcomes are in line with the organisation's standards.
2. You are not in a formal capability process.
3. There is no formal disciplinary sanction live on your employment record.\*
4. You have completed all required statutory and/or mandatory training.
5. If you are a line manager, you will need to have completed all the appraisals for your staff as required.

\*For staff in NHS Wales, a first warning can be disregarded in this process.

There is an expectation that all staff will meet these standards and be able to progress on their pay step date.

## Pay progression and your annual appraisal

The pay progression framework is linked to your annual appraisal. To progress to your next pay step point, you must have had an appraisal within the previous 12 months. Your employer is responsible for ensuring that you have an annual appraisal meeting. This is a two-way discussion between you and your manager to ensure that you are clear about the duties and responsibilities of your job, that you have the appropriate skills and knowledge needed for your role and have an opportunity to identify any development needs.

## How do I know when my pay step date is due?

Your pay step date will usually be on the anniversary date of your first day at work, or the anniversary date of your last promotion. But remember, your pay step progression will not take place annually. The pay steps will take longer to reach – as shown in the table - but you will get to the top of your band more quickly than before.

The timing of your annual appraisal may not coincide with your pay step date. This is not a problem, provided you have had an appraisal within the previous 12 months of the pay step date. The outcome of your most recent appraisal will be taken into consideration when you come to have a pay step review meeting.

## Regular one-to-one meetings with your manager

In between your annual appraisal, you should be having regular one-to-one conversations with your manager throughout the year. The aim is to promote mutual trust between you and your manager, to discuss progress on work objectives and identify any support you need to help you carry out your role. At these meetings

it is particularly important to raise any issues that you think may affect your pay progression. For example, if you were due to undertake a course of mandatory training, and that training was cancelled; or if you were unable to complete a work project due to short staffing. The purpose of these regular conversations is to ensure that when it comes to your annual appraisal meeting and any pay step review meeting, there are **no surprises**.

## Getting the best out of your annual appraisal

Your manager should ensure your appraisal meeting is constructive, that you have an opportunity to be listened to, and that you feel comfortable during the process. It is your responsibility to actively participate in the appraisal meeting. To get the best out of the meeting, it is important to be prepared and know what to expect. There are three key steps in the appraisal procedure:

1. preparation
2. appraisal discussion
3. completion of paperwork as a record of the meeting.

### How should I prepare for my appraisal meeting?

Your manager should give you a minimum of two weeks' notice of your appraisal meeting, and where possible, they should agree the date with you. They should provide the relevant paperwork, including an appraisal form to record the discussion and decisions, a copy of your last appraisal, your job description and your person specification. It is important to check your job description to make sure it is up to date. If there are key aspects of your job that do not appear in the job description, you should raise these with your manager.

#### Top tip

Many employers provide training workshops on appraisals so that staff are familiar with the process and can participate with confidence. Find out if your employer provides training and ask for a place on the next workshop. You can also contact your UNISON rep for advice.

### Reflect on your work over the past 12 months

To prepare for your appraisal, think about things that have gone well for you in your job, and anything you are especially proud of having achieved over the past year. Think about areas where things could have gone better, and any barriers or frustrations you have encountered. Be ready to share and discuss examples with your manager. Start keeping a note of your experiences and achievements at work, so that you can bring examples to discuss with your manager at your appraisal meeting.

You may already be in the habit of recording your experiences and learning at work as part of your clinical/professional (CPD) portfolio – this will provide you with useful examples to use in your appraisal meeting. If you are in a non-registered role and are not in the habit of recording your work experiences, you can start keeping a note from now on. You will find this very useful in your appraisal meeting.

## What happens during your appraisal and how?

### Having a conversation

Appraisal meetings are a conversation between you and your manager about your job role, about setting objectives, reviewing progress, and identifying any development needs. The conversation should be about the work that you do every day, it is not intended to catch you out in any way. During the appraisal you should be encouraged to do most of the talking. Don't be nervous, be ready to participate fully in the discussion. Look through the duties and responsibilities in your job description and come ready with examples to show how you carry these out in your day to day work.

### Setting objectives

Part of the appraisal conversation between you and your manager will be about agreeing objectives for the coming year and linking these to the organisation's standards, values and behaviours, or competency framework. These are things that your employer should have agreed with your trade union and should have made you aware of, well in advance of your appraisal meeting. But if you are not sure what they are, or if you have any concerns, contact your local UNISON rep for advice and guidance.

In some organisations, employees may be asked to develop a 'stretch objective' – an additional goal or task that is over and above the minimum duties of their job role. Progress against a stretch objective should not be measured as part of the assessment for pay progression.

### Top tip

The objectives you agree with your manager should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. When agreeing your objectives for the year ahead, make sure they are clearly understood by you and your manager, and are not open to interpretation. If they include a 'stretch' objective, make sure it is identified as such on your appraisal record. Stretch objectives should not be measured as part of your pay progression assessment.

### Identifying learning and development needs - agreeing your personal development plan

An appraisal meeting is an opportunity for you and your manager to identify any learning or development needs that will help you meet your work objectives for the coming year and in the longer term. These will be recorded in your personal development plan (PDP.)

Learning and development opportunities may include shadowing another staff member, attending meetings, reading, observing, or undertaking a training course. Once your plan is agreed, your manager should ensure that you have adequate opportunity to put the plans into practice throughout the year.

### Top tip

Make sure you are familiar with your employer's training, learning and development policies so that you know what is available to you. If you're not sure, speak to your UNISON rep for advice.

## No surprises!

During the appraisal meeting there should be no surprises. If your manager has had a concern about any aspect of your work during the year, they should have raised it at the time it arose, and not at your annual appraisal. They may wish to refer to an issue or concern that you have both discussed before, but they should not introduce anything new.

## What happens after the appraisal?

After the appraisal, your manager must ensure that a report of the meeting, including any agreed learning objectives, are recorded in the appropriate way. Actions should have a clear timeframe attached to them and your manager should make sure you have adequate opportunity for development throughout the year. The record of your appraisal meeting should be agreed and signed by both you and your manager. You should be given a copy, and another should be placed on your personal file.

# The pay step review process

The pay step review process works in parallel with annual appraisal. However, they remain two separate processes and the following section explains the pay step review process.

## What about my pay progression – how does that work?

Central to the agreement that UNISON and the NHS unions have signed up to, is a clear expectation that staff will be supported by their manager to meet the required standards of their job, so they can progress to the next pay step on their due date. The pay step review meeting should take place to confirm this.

Before you are due to move up to the next point in your pay band, your manager will invite you to a **pay step review** meeting. The meeting will focus on the outcome of your most recent appraisal (which must have taken place within the last 12 months) plus any relevant progress since then.

### Top tip

It's important to remember that there should be **no surprises** at your pay step review meeting. If there are any issues that you feel are relevant and that could affect the decision on your pay progression, you should raise these with your manager and ask for them to be placed on record. If you have any concerns about an issue that may affect your pay progression, contact your UNISON rep for advice.

## Can my pay step be deferred?

The expectation is that all staff will meet the required standards and will progress up the pay band on their pay step date. However, your manager may defer your pay step progression if they conclude that you are not meeting the pay progression standards, unless this is for reasons beyond your control or there are other mitigating factors to explain why you have not been able to meet those standards. You have a right to challenge the decision if you do not agree with it.

## What happens if my pay step is deferred?

If your pay step progression is deferred, your manager should work with you to agree a plan of action to ensure the required standards can be met at the earliest opportunity. This should include a timescale and details of how any training and support needs will be met.

A further pay step review meeting should be arranged at an agreed date to review progress, and where satisfactory, your pay step progression can be agreed. The effective date for progressing to the next pay step should be the earliest date that the relevant standards are shown to have been met. Your pay step date for future years will remain unchanged.

## Challenging a decision to defer your pay step progression

If your pay step progression is deferred, you have a right to challenge your manager's decision. You are strongly advised to contact your UNISON rep who will guide and support you through the local procedures.

### Top tip

If you are going through a formal capability process or have a live disciplinary sanction on your employment record at the time of your pay step review meeting, this may result in deferral of your pay step increment. It is important that you seek advice from your UNISON rep early in the process, especially if your pay step review date is approaching.



## Supporting you at work

Some people get anxious at the mention of appraisal meetings or pay step progression meetings. Please don't worry – it should not be a scary experience. UNISON and all other NHS unions have signed up this process in partnership with employers. It is designed to support you at work so that you and your manager are clear about your job role and work objectives. We want to make sure that the process takes place in a fair and transparent manner so that it works as intended. If you need advice or support about any aspect of your annual appraisal or your pay step progression meeting, contact your UNISON rep.

### Top tips

- Invest time to prepare for your annual appraisal meeting.
- Be aware that there is a direct link between your appraisal and your pay step progression.
- Be sure to find out your pay step date and speak to your manager if you have not had an appraisal within the previous 12 months.

## UNISON support and useful resources

Your local UNISON rep is your first point of contact. Call the UNISON direct helpline free on **0800 0 857 857** if you need help contacting your local rep.

UNISON learning reps have specialist knowledge about the learning and development policies in your employer and about learning opportunities offered by UNISON.

Find out how to learn new skills through UNISON Learn: <https://learning.unison.org.uk/>

NHS Employers have produced guidance for staff: [www.nhsemployers.org/pay-pensions-and-reward/2018-contract-refresh/pay-progression/guidance-for-staff](http://www.nhsemployers.org/pay-pensions-and-reward/2018-contract-refresh/pay-progression/guidance-for-staff)

Knowledge and Skills Framework <https://www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF>

## Jargon buster

**Appraisal** - a formal, annual meeting between you and your manager where you discuss your job role and work objectives to make sure you are meeting the required standards. The appraisal meeting also offers you a chance to talk about your career plans and seek support for development opportunities.

**Competency framework** - a means by which employer organisations communicate the standards expected of their staff. It ensures that staff have a common understanding of the organisation's values and expected behaviours.

**CPD** - continuing professional development – a process of keeping track of the skills, knowledge and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training. It's a record of what you experience, learn and then apply.

**Job description** - a document that sets out the essential job requirements, duties, responsibilities, and skills required to perform a specific job role.

**Knowledge and Skills Framework** - the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) is a broad generic competency framework for describing the knowledge and skills NHS staff need to apply at work in order to deliver high quality services. Employers may use the NHS KSF or other skills/competency frameworks, which are in line with the KSF principles.

**Objectives** - plans related to your work and career which are agreed between you and your manager in your annual appraisal meeting.

**One-to-one meetings** - regular conversations between you and your manager to discuss progress on work objectives and identify any support you need.

**Pay band** - the level at which your salary sits within the NHS pay structure. The pay bands run from Band 2 up to Band 9.

**Pay step date** - the date on which you should move up to the next pay step (increment) within your pay band. Your pay step date will usually be on the anniversary date of your first day at work, or the anniversary date of your last promotion. But remember, pay step progression will not take place annually.

**Pay step progression meeting** - also called a pay step review meeting, describes the meeting between a staff member and their manager to confirm that they can move up to the next pay point within their pay band.

**Personal development plan** - a plan for your learning and development needs that you have agreed with the support of your manager at your annual appraisal meeting.

**Person specification** - a description of the qualifications, skills, experience, knowledge and other attributes which a candidate must possess to perform the job duties. The person specification is drawn from the job description and forms the foundation for recruiting to the job.

**Stretch objective** - an additional goal or task that is over and above the minimum required duties of your job role. Progress against a stretch objective should not be measured as part of the assessment for pay progression.

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